

TOWN OF BROOKLINE  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
Administration and Finance Subcommittee

The Administration and Finance Subcommittee held a public hearing for Articles 28 and 29 on April 20, 2022 at 6:00 p.m via Zoom. The public hearing was attended by 16 people including the lead petitioner, Jay Sweitzer-Shalit; co-petitioners Emy Takinami (TMM p10), Natalia Linos (TMM p6), Rebecca Stone (TMM p3), Luciana Schachnik and C. Scott Ananian (TMM p10); Town Clerk Ben Kaufman; Anne Greenwald (TMM p8), Arthur Conquest (TMM p6), Ryan Black (TMM p6), Andrew Shalit, Naomi Schweitzer, Shuba Dixit (Advancement and Immigration Committee) as well as subcommittee members Harry Bohrs, Neil Gordon, Kelly Hardebeck and Stephen Reeders.

The recording is available at:

[https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/891ZoimJN\\_cXg-EshmjbKMxzclKAhzOxrLYOmThdQh559zUFQH15HqACVXdxO5ps.lxg7RvHZBY5OqGsS](https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/891ZoimJN_cXg-EshmjbKMxzclKAhzOxrLYOmThdQh559zUFQH15HqACVXdxO5ps.lxg7RvHZBY5OqGsS)

Passcode: nt.51W%d

### **ARTICLE 28 and 29**

Submitted by Jay Sweitzer-Shalit

Articles 28 and 29, if passed, would reauthorize the Select Board to file a petition with the General Court for special legislation that would authorize Brookline to extend local voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds and permanent legal residents residing in Brookline.

An article advocating for the expansion of voting rights to 16 and 17 y.o. was approved at Town Meeting in 2019 and one similar to WA 29 expanding voting rights to permanent legal residents was approved by Town Meeting in 2010. Home Rule petitions expire with the end of a legislative session and need to be refiled for the legislature to take action.

### **Discussion of Article 28 and 29**

Jay Sweitzer-Shalit made a presentation that summarized the goals and rationale for the warrant articles as written. The objective of the articles is to expand the voting rights to two groups who are affected by decisions made in local elections but are not currently allowed to participate. It was stressed that voting is an important aspect of civic participation that is currently unavailable to 16 and 17 year olds. The petitioner pointed out that Town Meeting has taken up issues that impact teenagers or were student petitions as evidence of the level of engagement from students in the age range specified in the warrant article. He also shared that Maryland has allowed 4 municipalities to extend the right to vote in local elections to 16 and 17 y.o.s and 2 municipalities in California allow them to vote in school board elections. The presentation highlighted that permanent legal residents own property and pay taxes in Brookline and are financially impacted by property tax overrides that are voted on in our local elections.

There was strong support for the articles and several attendees spoke in favor including: Ms. Takinami, Ms. Stone, Ms. Dixit, Ms. Linos, Ms Greenwald and Mr. Ananian. Speakers pointed out these articles come as other states seek to restrict access to voting and immigrant and youth rights are under attack. They felt the warrant articles represent a powerful statement of Brookline's civic values and its goal of further advancing diversity, equity and inclusion.

Ben Kaufman, Brookline's Town Clerk, spoke and shared the potential financial and operational impact of implementing WA 28 and 29. All towns and cities in Massachusetts use the Voter Registration Information System (VRIS) to update, track and maintain accurate voting lists. The VRIS is run by the Secretary of State's office and most election materials pertaining to voters are generated from it including: lists for election day, absentee and early voting; voter registration confirmation and voter registration reports. The State also provides Brookline with absentee ballot materials, including applications, and voter registration forms in multiple languages. Teenagers in Massachusetts can pre-register to vote when

they are at least 16 years old and the data is stored in VRIS, but unavailable to cities and towns until the registrant turns 18.

To implement the changes requested by Articles 28 and 29, Brookline would need to develop, operate and maintain a separate system for municipal elections that included registered 16 and 17 y.o. and permanent legal residents. One of the Town's current vendors was able to give a very preliminary estimate for creating a new database and estimated the cost to start at \$30-\$40K. The Town Clerk's office would also need to produce election-related materials including all voter lists, absentee ballot applications and voter registration forms.

A question about why the age of 16 was asked and the petitioner and Ms. Stone responded that 16 is the age at which a person gains the right to drive a car, work restrictions are removed and is the age of consent. In other states, sixteen is also the age of emancipation.

Neil Gordon questioned whether home rule petitions were an effective form of advocacy if the legislature has refused to act in the past. Neil recommended modifying the articles to be resolutions rather than proceeding with them as is and made a substitute motion to that effect. The motion failed by a vote of 1-3-0 and the subcommittee voted on the articles as submitted.

### **Recommendation**

The subcommittee recommends FAVORABLE ACTION on Warrant Article 28 and 29 by a vote of 2-0-2.